THE PATHANS
A SKETCH

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This is a delightful little sketch of our much-heard-of-but-little-known neighbours—the Pathans. It aims at increasing our understanding and appreciation of these very complex people who are simple and big-hearted to a fault, and yet have a custom of deciding everything by a fight.

The author, Ghani Khan, son of the great Abdul Ghaffar Khan, popularly known as the "Frontier Gandhi," has a genial humour and a simple and convincing literary style.

Being a Pathan himself and in love with his people he gives a vivid and a glowing picture of their mode of living, of their history, customs superstitions, folk-songs and politics. He wants to introduce the Pathan to us and make him tell us "of his struggle and his dreams, of his love and his feuds, his field and his watch-tower, his new rifle and his old wife." For, as the author says, "his violent nature, strong body and tender heart make a very unstable combination for living, but an ideal one for poetry and colour." Those who know the Pathan will readily support this statement.

The Pathans

A Sketch

by

GHANI KHAN

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THE PATHANS

I dedicate this book to the first Pathan I knew and the finest I have known—My Father.



KHAN ABDUL GHAFAR KHAN



GHANI KHAN

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THE PATHAN

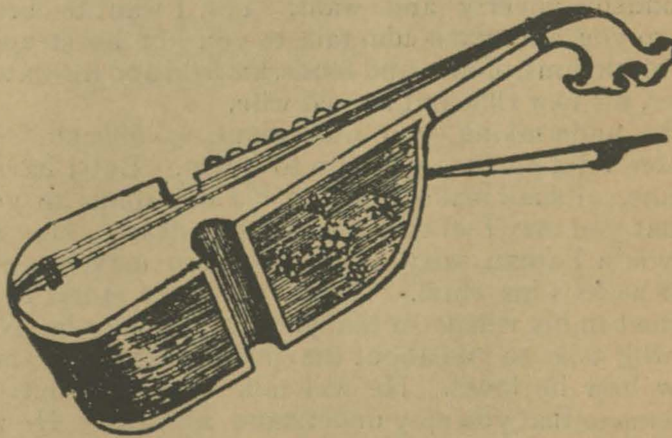
THE most difficult part of writing is to know where to begin, just as the most difficult part of speaking is to know where to stop. Nothing is more irritating than a blank sheet of paper staring stupidly into your face when you are bursting to write but cannot make up your mind how to set about it.

I want to talk about the Pathans, the people I love, which makes my task harder than ever. I want you to love them as I do. But the Pathan is not easy to love. He takes a lot of knowing. His is a most complicated simplicity. I want to bring him down from the peaks of Khyber and the fields of Hashnager face to face with you—in his torn clothes and grass shoes, his eyes full of manliness, laughter and the devil, and his head full of a childish and noble pride—the chief camouflage he uses to hide his poverty and want. Yes, I want to bring him to you and make him talk to you—of his struggle and his dreams, of love and feuds, his field and his watch-tower, his new rifle and his old wife.

The undertaking, you will admit, is difficult. No wonder I did not know where to begin. But I have a scheme. I shall make him sing his love-songs to you, so that you may feel the throb of his heart. He will tell you a Pathan fairy tale so that you may listen to what he tells his child. He will tell you a story of an incident in his village so that you may see how he lives. He will talk to you about the moon so that you may know how he loves. He will talk to you about his customs so that you may understand his laws. He will

talk of dacoities, raids and duels so that you may know the power that drives him. He will talk to you of priests and magic aud charms so that you may know the darkness in his heart. He will talk to you of life and death and right and wrong, and I hope by that time you will know him, and after you get to know him I shall butt in and try to talk about him, of his relation to you and his connection with your future. For whether you like it or not he is your neighbour. And on the most unfortunate side of your house—the side that faces Russia. You must know him because Russia will have a lot to say about the shape of things to come. They will come to the Pathan before they come to you.

May I then introduce you to your neighbour ! He has a fine turban and intriguing trousers. Let's have a look at him. But before we do that we might as well know something of his race and his origin.



(2)

HISTORY

MOST people look at his nose and say he is a Jew. Because they cannot link him with anyone else, they say he is one of the lost tribes. His Islamic faith, and its inevitable influence on his life and manners, give a certain plausibility to this impression. Yet the basic principles that rule him, no matter who the King is, are more Spartan than Jewish.

I have been very curious about his origin. The oldest writer I could consult about him is that charming old humbug. Herodotus, who believed all that he heard, and wrote all he believed. He refers to the Pathan's part of the world as Bectia, and says it is inhabited by a small dark people who deal in gold and spices. He goes on to say that this gold is collected at great risk of life in the desert from ants as big as dogs who bring it out from the bowels of the earth. The sun in this gold field is too hot for any animal except the camel. So when the ants, who are supposed to indulge in road—and town—building only at night, retire from the sun into their holes the Bectians rush in on their camels and collect the gold and gallop back to get out of the home of those man-eating ants before sunset. Many of them, says the kinaly Herodotus, are killed but some get away with the precious metal.

This proves many things :

(1) That the Bectians were not as good warriors as the Greeks but they were better liars.

(2) That the world had a sytsem of trade rights and monopoly even in the time of Alexander.

(3) That this is the only argument in favour of the theory that then the Pathans might have been Jews.

(4) That dear old Herodotus is perfectly truthful and has therefore recorded the greatest number of lies. The word has always had clever liars and saintly Herodotuses who believed them.

It also proves that the people who now inhabit the vague Bectia of Herodotus (he is poor in geography—all gossips are and the old Greek is a delightful old gossip—with a solemnity that makes youl augh and a skin that makes you wonder) are neither small nor dark nor clever monopoly traders. On the contrary they are big and fair and straight and look upon murder as a much more respectable pastime than trade.

Apparently some friends of Herodotus settled along the rivers and valleys of the Bectians, acquired their lovely girls for wives and talked to their children about war and courage, death and glory. For the Pathan will forgive you anything if you do it bravely enough. His villages have Greek names. His tribes have Greek customs. Like the Greek he is a great poet and a great warrior. Like the Greek almost all his wars are over women.

The Pathans have no written history but they have thousands of ruins where the hungry stones tell their story to anyone who would care to listen.

The oldest relics you see are of a distinctly pre-Greek period. They are the same in conception and style as those of the United Provinces or Orissa, *e.g.*, the features of dolls and gods (two things that humanity has a way of mixing up) which are most unlike those of the Pathans of today.

But when we come to the Buddhist and the Greco-Buddhist period the features of the dolls and Buddhas and kings and saints take the likeness of those of the Pathans of today. The great ferocity of the Pathan

might well be a reaction to a rather long dose of Buddhist non-violence.

Racially he is clearly Greek, crossed with something. What that something was I do not know. Nor would I worry about it any further. What he was five thousand years ago does not matter.

It is also obvious that he was a Buddhist before he became a Muslim, and that he was a Hindu before he became a Buddhist. I do not know what sort of a Buddhaist he was in spite of the thousands of images of Buddha that he made. For he is a good shot, and a bad soldier. He is too independent to make the ideal follower of any prophet, so probably he was a good sculptor and a poor Buddhist.

Whatever he might be, he is not a Jew, for where will you find a Jew who will tell his child about war and courage, death and glory! He is perhaps a mixture of every race that came to India from the heart of Asia—the Persian, the Greek, the Mongol and the Turk.

Each race has contributed something to his virtues and vices, looks and beliefs, religion and love-songs. His temperament, like his clothes, is picturesque and elegant. He loves fighting but hates to be a soldier. He loves music but has a great contempt for the musician. He is kind and gentle but hates to show it. He has strange principles and peculiar notions. He is hot-blooded and hot-headed and poor and proud. If that is what you called a Jew, then he is certainly a Jew, nose and all.

The best course would be to forget how it all started and look upon what he really is today. Neither a Jew nor a Greek, but a temperamental neighbour who might become a loving friend, or a deadly enemy. He knows no happy medium; that is his greatest virtue and his greatest *drawback*.

(3)

FOLK-SONGS

THE folk-songs of a nation are its spiritual self-portraits, provided the race is primitive enough to be honest. It is easy to be honest in feeling—one cannot help it—but extremely difficult to be so in the expression of it, specially as men become civilised. When custom begins to dictate to instinct, when the eyes look more at the listeners than at the face of the beloved, that is the time when convention overcomes music, ethics overcome passion, and desire is substituted for love. So if you find the Pathan folk-songs too brutal and naked and direct, do not forget that he lives a straight and primitive life in a lonely valley or a small village, and is too busy worrying about the next thing to shoot, to find time to be civilised.

Let us go to his valley in Dir. There he is—walking towards us, of medium height and sensitive build. He has long locks, neatly oiled and combed, wrapped in a red silk kerchief which is twisted round the head like the crown of Caesar. He wears a flower in his hair and collyrium in his eye. His lips are dyed red with walnut bark. He carries his *sitar* in his hand and his rifle at his shoulder. You would think he is very effeminate until you looked at his eyes. They are clear, manly and bold. They do not know fear, and won't live long enough to know death. He pays the most lavish price for these made-up eyes and painted lips. This son of the bravest tribe of the Pathans never takes cover in a fight and always laughs and sings when he is frightened. He will soon die fighting, a man as brave and strong and hand-

some as he, for he knows only how to love and laugh and fight and nothing else. He is taught nothing else. Let us listen to his song :

O the flowers are lined
In your hair
And your eyes, O my beloved,
Are like flowers of Narcissus.
O my priceless rare treasure,
O my life, O my soul,
O my little mountain poppy,
You are my morning star,
You the flower on the slope,
You the white snow on the peak.
Your laughter is the waterfall,
Your whispers the evening breeze.
O my branch of apple-blossom,
Who spilt moonlight in your eyes ?
O my little butterfly,
Come and live in my heart.

And down from the field by the riverside comes the clear sweet voice of a girl which says, apparently to the trees in her father's field :

O my lover, build a hut
On the peak of Illum,
And I will come dancing to it
Like a golden partridge.

That is how it starts. Then the boy goes and tells someone to tell his parents. And suppose everyone agrees and everything is all right, which it seldom is, then the mother fixes a date to fetch the golden partridge. The girls of the boy's family are on the way in their best clothes, and an overdose of make-up in honour of the bride. Two white hands with henna-red palms

strike up the cymbal, the giggles subside, and the song begins:

O the groom is tall as a pine
And the bride is a bush of roses,
On her head is a golden shawl,
On her chin is a beauty spot;
She is dressed in clothes
That are old and torn.
O the flower garden
In a ruined town!
O the boy is tall like a poplar
And the girl is a bush of roses.

And then they get married and live happily together for they know that they will not be long together.

One day he goes out, and never comes back. He has laughed his way into a bullet that was fired by another of his own blood and race. His wife inherits from him a moment of joy, two sons and a lifetime of sorrow. She hangs up his rifle and *sitar* for his sons. She learns to hide her tears when she hears a love-song in the evening. She worships her elder son because he looks like his father, and the younger one because he smiles like him. When she sits by the fire in the evening and looks at the eyes of her children and then at the empty space beside them, she thinks of him who is not there. "What was our father like?" the boys ask. She cannot tell them that he was a great doctor, or a philosopher or a priest She says he was a great man and a great fighter and she sings to them the song that was made about that fight, the fight in which the Malaizais beat the Alizais, the fight in which their father died with his three brothers and five cousins

It was a cursed day, bleak and cold,
It was the last day of spring

When Hakim Khan and his heroes bold
Conquered the fort of the Alizai king.
A messenger came
And rushed through the tribe,
From village to village,
From house to house,
And called to fight
And glory and death
The men and youths
Of Malaizais.

And men picked up
Their guns,
And wives pleaded
And mothers cried
And men looked at
Their children play,
And ground their teeth
And swore and sighed.

And brother looked
At brother's eyes
To see he felt
The same—
The wives wept,
The mothers cried,
The men
They rode away.

And little children
With little cries
And little hearts
And little hands,
Asked for their fathers,
Uncles and friends,
And made their mothers cry the more—
How can a child understand!

The men went through the valley Hazzaro
And up the peak of Naroke,
They sang of laughter and tomorrow
And covered death in a little joke.

The king of the Alizais
Bent and kissed
His only son,
His only child.
He loved the name
He bore and blessed
And he was brave
And strong and wild.
"I will tame the product,
And kill the strong,
For I am stronger
And prouder.
I will crush those devils,
Those foolish fools
With cunning and
Gunpowder."

The men of Malaizais
Laughed at death
And laughed at kings
And marched and sang,
And thought of Heaven
And Hell and houris
And springs and flowers
And butterflies,
And said, "Allah
Is good and sweet
To him who laughs
And sings and dies"
They said, "The cowards
Weep and work
But fighters go
To Paradise."

And Hakim Khan
Sat on his horse,
And said, "O sons
Of heroes past,
That day of
Weighing manliness,
That day has come
At lost.

"The day that you
Must prove that you
Are born of fire
And truth—
The day that you
Must give your blood
And dreams and life
And youth."

Ah, sing the song
And pluck the strin;
And pray for
Hakim Khan,
Who lived and sang
And loved and died
And won the name
Shahi Mardan, King of Men.

He led his men
And took the fort
Midst blood and Thunder and cries.
He killed the king
And burnt the town
And married
His fourteen wives.

And seven hundred funerals went,
And each a friend,
And each a man,
And seven hundred
Children ran
To see and love and leave
The man
Who brought them
Song and laughter,
To think of life
And song and death
To know the ever
Ever after.

The Pathan has a tender heart but tries to hide it under a rough and gruff exterior. He is too good a fighter to leave his weakest part uncovered. "Don't be so sweet," he says, "that people may swallow you up, nor so bitter that people may spit you out." So he covers his sweetness with bitterness, self-presevation pure and simple. His violent nature, strong body and tender heart make a very unstable combination for living but an ideal one for poetry and colour. He keeps a rough face because he does not want you to see his soft eyes. He would rather you thought he was a rogue than let you see him weep his eyes out for his wife.

His father and mother try to inure him to the hardness of their own lives. "The eyes of the dove are lovely," they tell him, "but the air is made for the hawk. So cover your dove-like eyes and grow claws." He becomes a hawk. But sometimes in the evening he forgets life and its hardship and begins to coo like a dove.

O the flowers with human beauty,
O the eyes full of soft light,
And lips that intoxicate,
O the lips that madden.

Oh Allah ! You gave beauty
The light and song of Your Being,
And gave my beloved in place of laughter
A garden of white and red flowers,
You gave Love the strength of the ocean
And the heart of a king,
Why did You give music the sound, the colour
And the soothing softness of prayer.
And You gave me a world of sorrows and longings
And filled my heart with tenderness,
Ecstasy and wonder,
And then gave her dreamy eyes
Full of beauty and comfort,
Sometimes flooded with moonlight,
Sometimes shaded with the evening dusk,
Sometimes brimming with hopes and dreams,
Compassionate and loving, kind and proud.

O Allah of Hell and Judgment and Pain.
O Allah of curling locks and pure pearls and purer song,
Oh Allah of love and beauty and youth and madness,
O Allah of the love oj the butterfly and the dreams of the flower,
O Maker of the narcissus, the poppy and the rose,
O Maker of Nasim, and kisses and music,
Why did You make from Beauty
This city of dust,
And why did You give the beloved
The light and song of Your Being.

Poor Pathan ! he cannot understand what his priest tells him in the light of what his heart tells him.

I have given you the meaning of his folk-songs but not

their rhythm and flow, their most important elements. You cannot understand a folk-song by reading it, you must hear and see it. You cannot understand velvet from a description of it. You must touch it with your fingers and rub it against your cheek in order to know the deep and subtle shades of softness that go to make it. Therefore if you really want to hear and know a Pathan folk-song, go to the bank of one of his many rivers, preferably in the evening when the girls go to fetch their water and the youths hover around to get their daily dose of hope and longing, the only wine the Pathan drinks.

I promised you folk-songs and gave you a very amateurish ordinary love-story instead, that is primitive enough to end in marriage and children. I am sorry but that is just like a Pathan. He cannot think of love without marriage. If he does, he pays for it with his life and therefore all his love poetry is about those who dared it. Society all the world over will hound you for breaking a convention and worship you for daring to do so. Man has a way of worshipping the Breaker of Idols while posing as a great devotee of the temple.

The Pathan may shoot the lover of his daughter but he will sing to the glory of love. A strange attitude, you will admit. No stranger than yours when you would hang a thief and admire a merchant. Man has a way of hanging Christ, and asking Pilate to dinner. But whenever he wants to sing it is of Christ, not of Pilate. There are no love-songs about the law. No poet has ever dedicated a song to the mother of his ten children.

The Pathan feels just the same as you. He cannot affoard that expensive luxury, the prison, but he can afford a cartridge. The feeling is the same in both cases—only his expression is stronger because he is stronger and poorer. He cannot give Pilate a "gin Rickety," so he gives him a bite of melon. That is all. But when he sings of love his eyes grow soft and dreamy as yours do

—for love and dreams are as universal as measles and fairies.



(4)

AN INCIDENT

THE evenings in the Peshawar valley in the winter are long and dark and intimate. Thcy are cold and bleak and full of whispers. Therefore one loves to sit by a long fire, look into the flames and mix up dreams with realities.

It was a cold winter night and I was sitting by a crackling fire, alone as usual. I heard the quick step of my dear old friends, Murtaza Khan, outside. "Where are you, friend," he shouted from fifty yards, Come in, come in," I shouted back and opened the door for him. His two bodyguards saluted me and went away to join mine and Murtaza stepped in. He was slim and of more than medium height. He had a long head, a large forehead and a dimpled chin. What you noticed at once was his thin determined mouth, shrewd suspicious eyes, a very lumpy intellectual head and the revolver slung round his shoulder. His clothes were not very clean and his hands were brutal and dirty. You would never think of letting him into your room. but I opened the door and my heart to him, because I knew him and his father knew my father and his grandfather my grandfather.

He was the eldest child of a proud Khan and had to defend that pride at a very early age when he shot another Khan, who had insulted his old father. He became an outlaw at the age of fifteen, was caught when he was thirty and for fourteen years sampled the torture of Indian jails. On his release, he joined the Nationalist movement and went to jail again and was a notorious prisoner, for he was too weak for flogging and too old

for hard labour. So he did what he pleased and caused many headaches to his jailers, and nervous breakdowns to their deputies. He walked in and settled down by the fire. I took the opposite chair. "Commander," I said, "how is life ?" We always called him "commander" because he was a Red Shirt (Khudai Khidmatgar) Commander in 1930. He looked long into the fire and said he was growing too old to know about life. I looked at his suspicious eyes. They were dreamy and straight. They had accepted me as a friend and had dropped their suspicion. So I ventured the question that I had always wanted to ask : "Murtaza, what made you kill your best friend, Atta, just before you were caught ?" He looked deeply into my eyes to reassure himself, then looked back into the fire and said, "It was my uncle, the one I hated and still do. You see, I had been an outlaw for twelve years. I had a band of brave followers who robbed people on the roads and in the villages and brought me their booty, because I insured them against starvation and lack of ammunition. I was therefore the pet of my ambitious uncle. He feasted me and supported me and I intimidated his powerful rivals for him. I added to his importance in the eyes of the English rulers, and to his striking power in the minds of the other Khans. I did not know this till too late. I thought he loved me for my sake, because I was his flesh and blood, the son of his brother, and I returned that love and generosity with sincere respect and devotion.

"One evening he sent for me. Out of my hide-out in the bitter cold I went to the warmth of my grandmother's hearth. He came—my uncle—and related a long story of how Atta had conspired with his enemies to murder him. He held my feet and wept. He implored me to save him and the family honour. I hated his tears and his clinging hands and refused. Then my aunt joined in. She did not cringe or weep but looked at me with deep sorrowful eyes and asked if I would stand by and

see my father's brother killed. 'He is old and grey,' she said,'and you are young and strong. Do you owe nothing to the family that brought you into the world and gave you its name and prestige? Your father, Abdullah, never shirked a nasty job. He was born a Khan and lived like a Khan and died like a Khan.' That finished me. I promised to do it." "How?" I asked. For Atta was a notorious outlaw, brave and unscrupulous, heartless and daring. He had escaped the law of the Government as successfully as he had escaped the law of the people. I had always hated Atta, in spite of his fine looks and the stories of superhuman daring that were told about him, because he had killed a dear old man, the father of one of my school friends. I was too young to know then that the dear kind old man, owed a debt of blood from the days of his youth. He sowed in youth and Atta grew up to make him reap in his old age. For the blood of a Pathan cannot be paid for except with blood. There are some things that he holds dearer than his own life, and there are many more that he holds dearer than anyone else's life. This dear old man was young and reckless once and had trampled under foot the rights of some weaklings. But the weaklings produced Atta. He grew up. He saw his mother hang down her head in shame, he saw his brothers look at the ground when certain things and people were mentioned. He understood that he must kill the dear old man or hang down his head in shame like his mother and look at the ground like his brothers. He was too young, too handsome and too strong for shame. So he picked up his gun and blasted that shame out of this world and thus established his right to be taken notice of and respected. But I hated him for it. Because I did not know the history of the old man. I only knew his grey beard and kindness, only the kind beautiful wife in his house and not the circumstances that led to her being his wife.

All men admire an outlaw, and if he is brave and handsome, they are likely to forgive him anything. Atta was handsome and undoubtedly brave. The old condemned him, but the young idolised him. Then one day he was found dead near my grandfather's water-mill. The whole village flocked to see him. So did I. I was only twelve years old then. As soon as he was dead, people remembered all his crimes and gave the place of honour to Murtaza who had killed him. So did I. Murtaza had avenged the murder of my dear friend's father and I loved him for it.

I saw him soon after in chains. Several platoonsof police, reinforced by thousands of villagers, had surrounded him. He had fought all right, eight men against the world. When his ammunition was exhausted he had dropped his rifles into a well and given himself up to the police in daylight. He did not dare give himself and his party up at night for the police would have shot him : they were bribed by his enemies.

I saw him first when he was in chains, with his head bandaged where a bullet had grazed his forehead. He was marched into the village with his outlaws behind him. He was full of laughter and insolence. He ordered cold drinks for his captors, all the police force. He smiled, cut jokes and laughed and jeered. I was proud to tell the other village boys that he was a distant cousin of mine. They led him away to the sub-divisional jail. The British tried him, who had killed a murderer, and sentenced him to twenty year's hard labour.

I met him many years later when he had served his term in jail and I mine in a high school and an American college. We became great friends. I found his stories of death and murder and dacoity as fascinating as he found my stories of sky-scrapers and co-education and French girls and Spanish boys. "How did you manage to kill Atta ? I asked. " It was easy enough," he replied. " You see, he was a born killer. He had many

scores to settle in the village. He was always asking me to help him shoot someone. Well, for once I agreed. We started from our hide-out at about three in the morning to shoot one of his many victims. He had no servants, he could not afford them. I had three. I had asked one of them to shoot him when I gave the signal. We walked in single file, as is the usual habit of outlaws, until we reached your flour mill. There I signalled to the servant and walked away from the group on the pretence of making myself comfortable. Atta was explaining to the servants how they must shoot some poor wretch that he hated. I had gone a few steps only when I heard the shot. I turned back and saw another servant repeat it. Atta dropped and we boiled and ran for five miles through fields and ditches until we reached my hide-out."

"But why did you run?" I asked. "Surely no one was following you."

"We were running from the dead man." he replied with a shiver. "I wanted to put the world between him and me but I have never succeeded. He is always with me, I never saw him dead. He is always with me, the living Atta. He talks and laughs, bravely and recklessly."

"Were you afraid of him?" I inquired.

"You see, my friend," he said coldly, "I have never feared anything except death by disease, when you linger and cough and sneeze and are a nuisance to your dear and near ones. But an outlaw is always afraid of Atta. I did not trust him. If he could kill my uncle he could kill me, and when you have to choose between your neck and another's you always choose the other's. Anyway I hated it and I hated my uncle for making it impossible for me to do otherwise." He shivered and a look of agony came into his brown eyes. "I tried to shoot that uncle of mine to pay for it, but I could not.

I was caught and sentenced and when I came out I joined the Red Shirts and became non-violent. So that my uncle had a long life and I a sad conscience."

He smiled bitterly and shrugged his shoulders. "Anyway he was going to kill my uncle if I had not killed him first. But come, my friend," he said, "play us a tune."

I picked up the *sitar* and played a sad sorrowful tune and we both looked at the flames and said no more. There was no need to. I knew; I too was a Pathan.

I had always found Murtaza fascinating. This thin-lipped friend of mine was a myth. He was a notorious outlaw and he was a Red Shirt. "Non-violence," I asked, "how was it, how could it ever be your creed?" He looked up. "You see, I was a little saint for those four years. I made an effort, I tried to live up to my dreams instead of my desires. It was great, it was a miracle. I refused fortunes for a hope and spared lovely girls because they trusted me and looked up to me. You cannot help loving those that love you and you cannot hurt those that trust you. I tried to live up to what the people thought I was. Then the moment ended. I dropped down from the clouds into my own world of desire and envy and lust, and have wallowed in it ever since.

" It is hard to be a saint and a Khan at the same time. I became a good Khan. It was easier and more natural, for men are evil and must be punished. Saints forfeit the power of punishing. Law is the essence of life and a saint is a law-breaker as much as dacoit. Only it is harder to be a saint. I chose the easier path and settled down to a man, bad and selfish. I found my blood warmer than my brain, and customs harder to break than hearts, and ideals harder to live up to than life.

" Nature is merciless and does not indulge in ideals. Life is hard and plain and rugged. The dove is lovely

to look at and coos soothingly, but the hawk and his claws are more alive. I chose to be a hawk because I was born one. And if the doves do not like it they can lump it. For the world is not full of butterflies. And the golden eagle is respected more than the humming bird." I looked at his thin lips and agreed. Murtaza had been a hunted outlaw too long to understand doves and sunsets and rainbows.

(5)

A FAIRY TALE

IN the days of old there was a handsome young prince who ruled the many tribes of Khaloon as all his forefathers had done before him. He was married to the most beautiful princess on earth. She was gentle and delicate like the perfume of a rose-bud. Her body was frail and her lips were small. She had long, slim, helpless fingers and a deep soothing soft voice. But what made her the most beautiful princess on earth were her eyes. They were large and luminous; the moods of her soul and the colours of her world passed through them in a continuous dance, graceful and warm. Now their shadow would deepen to a hundred deep purples, reds and golds, and the prince felt as when he listencd to the soft notes of a sad, distant melody. Now the light in them would burst forth silvery, bright and warm, and the prince felt life and hope and love burst forth from somewhere in his heart and spread all over the world.

By the will of Allah it came to pass that one day when the prince got up and looked at his beloved, he discovered a dullness in her eyes. As the days passed the dullness increased, in spite of the many herbs and lotions that the court Hakims prescribed. All the tribes of Khaloon were sad and sorrowful.

The prince called an assembly of his wisest counsellors and asked their advice. " Heaven born," said Omar the Poet, " all light is fated to go beyond the sphere of our vision. It does not go out, but comes back to the light it came from. Like a note of music it must flow to silence. That flow is its shape. That going to

silence is its life. Therefore do not be sorrowful, O Prince, but grateful that you were favoured with the sound of a song that was the very heaven in sweetness, that you worshipped in the light of a spark that was greater than the moon and the sun. And now take the colour from your dreams, the light from your heart and pour it into the eyes of the princess and let your memory give shape to the melodies that come forth from them."

"Slop and nonsense," said Khaleel the Wise, "fiddlesticks and make-believe! Heaven-born, my prince, be wise and practical. The world is full of beautiful girls with shining eyes. I will bring you a bevy from the valley of Shameem who will turn your house into a firefly garden on a summer night."

But behold! The prince was furious at this and caught hold of Khaleel's beard and nearly pulled it all out. For the old man's beard was not as strong as his wisdom. Then the prince recovered himself and ordered him out of the palace and Khaleel shuffled out, a sad old man. But he remembered the saying of his wise father, who had told him, "My son, only a fool will advise the lover." He felt wise for having discovered he was a fool and became happy because he felt he was wiser. He chuckled and chuckled and went home to sleep and snored wise snores and dreamed foolish dreams.

Behold, there was a great and heavy silence in the palace. At last it was broken by Rahman the Seer. "My beloved prince," said he in his deep rich voice, "heed my words because it is not I who speak. In the mountains beyond the river to the east of Khaloon lives a man whom the world calls a beggar. But he has in his heart a pool of something that will cure any ailment, for it has conquered time and death. Go find him, O prince, ask for the magic liquid and put a drop in each eye of your princess. They will shine lovelier, brighter and dreamier than ever."

The prince smiled with joy and hope and all the

wise men heaved a sigh of relief and told one another what a truly great seer Rahman was and, absent-mindedly stroked their long beards. So by the grace of Allah the pri nce collected all his people and dogs and hunters and Hakims and searched and searched until they found the beggarman.

" What have you in your heart ? asked the prince.

" Love and laughter," laughed the beggarman.

"Could you give me two drops of it for my princess?" the prince asked.

" Yes," laughed the beggarman, " if you would pay the price for it. O Prince."

" Name it, O beggar," said the prince.

" Your kingdom for the drop of laughter and your pride for the drop of love," laughed the beggarman.

" H'm," said the prince frowning. " My kingdom indeed ! Beggarman, this kingdom has been given to me by the great Allah who very mercifully has also given me some powers with it. Since you have been so unloving to your prince and so stingy to your princess, I deem you unfit to hold such a treasure and confiscate the whole lot in the name of the law and the people." So saying he put the beggarman in irons and brought him to his palace and threw him into a dungeon.

The next morning when the door of the dungeon was opened, behold by the grace of Allah, what did they see but a heap of rags and skin and bones. The beggarman had gone and taken his love and laughter with him. On the wall he had written a message for the prince. " O, my great prince, that which is under your law I leave behind for your law to deal with."

When the prince saw this he was very angry for he was never defeated before. He was very angry with his wise men and pulled out all their beards. He was very angry with the princess because it was for her sake that he was defeated, and he said, " Blast her eyes." Then he sent for Khaleel the Wise and started

with him to the valley of Shameem with fine horses, musicians, hawks and greyhounds, and forgot his one defeat in the many blissful victories in the valley of Shameem.

But the poor little princess, she is nearly blind.



(6)

CUSTOMS

WHEN a law is bred into the very fibre of a race it becomes a custom and persists long after the need is gone and the occasion forgotten. For man gives to his children not only the shape of his own nose and the cranks in his character, he also teaches them his fears and forebodings, his songs and curses. He moulds his child as nearly as he can to his own shape.

The civilised man does it through his schools and books, the press and platfrom. He is not ashamed to use a little gunpowder and occasionally the hanging block to drive home some of his points. Civilisation is a continuous surrender of individual perfections to mass imperfection. Civilisation is not built on the songs of Don Juans but on the solid and pious resolutions of respectable middle-aged old husbands. That is why it is so poor in laughter. Each generation inherits a load of complications, adds to it and then passes it on to the next generation ; the load of laws and beliefs increases from age to age until the feet that have to carry it grow too weak for it. Then the crash comes. A culture dies. The worn-out runner drops out of the race. Those with stronger legs and lighter loads race forward.

Customs are subtle chains with which the primitive man tries to keep intact the pattern of his society. They are his school and radio, prime minister and preacher. You make a law and keep a good supply of gunpowder and men to help your weak brothers uphold it. He made a custom and invented magic and the devil to keep watch and ward for him. There is absolutely no dif-

ference between your law and his custom in object and purpose. Your wise judges wear the same serious expression as his high priest ; indeed they even wear his costume. Your laws are as stupid to him as his customs are to you. You can tie a knot in a silk thread as well as you can in a thick rope. He used a thin simple thread and you used a complicated thick rope. He did not need the thick rope any more than he had any necessity for your elaborate city drainage system. The interesting point is the knot. It is the same in both cases. Some say it was tied by fools to strangle the wise. Some say it was tied by the wise to help the fools. Be that as it may, the knot is there. A pathetic and heroic effort on the part of man to instil into his child's eyes his dreams and fears and follies.

You call it law and keep it in big books. He calls it custom and keeps it in his wife's treasure chest. You have to be either a judge or a criminal to know your law. He knows his customs before he knows how to eat. It is bred in him. It is mixed in his bones and works in his liver. He does not have to go to a learned man in a wig to know the law against which he sinned. He knows it as soon as he does it. He is his own judge and jailor. His ancestors have seen to it that it is so.

Now let us examine a few Pathan customs and try to see what they are driving at. For customs are the only tools with which primitive man carves the shape of his culture. It is a stroke of the brush in the hands of man the artist. It is not a stroke of lightning. It has a purpose, a will and a definite meaning, however awkward the shape. Let us take one of his most violent customs, which prescribes death for elopement or adultery. This ancient principle is active and living in the blood of the Pathan even today. It reacts violently when it clashes with the loose and generous ethics of the British-made law. The Pathan will shoot the seducer of his sister and walk proudly to the British-made gallows for it. The

law is made for cold English sister and the detached English brother. The Pathan is short of girls and generous of emotions. He must breed well if he is to breed fighters. The potential mother of the man of tomorrow is the greatest treasure of the tribe and is guarded jealously. This primitive custom is also useful for weeding out the over-sexed. It is a subtle system of selective breeding. But does the Pathan realise any of these things when he lifts his rifle to shoot the culprit ? He does not. He is mad with anger. He must shoot, there is no alternative. If he does not, his brothers will look down upon him, his father will sneer at him, his sister will avoid his eyes, his wife will be insolent and his friends will cut him dead. It is easier to be misunderstood by a judge who does not speak his language and be hanged by a law that does not understand his life. He does his duty by his people. He will play true to his blood even if he breaks his heart and neck into the bargain. He will walk to the gallows with proud steps with his hands covered with the blood of his wife or sister. And the admiring eyes of his people will follow him as they always do those who pay with their life for a principle. "Hero," shout the Pathans. "Murderer," says the judge. And I have never been able to find out who is right.

This very custom when given a chance to act alone works perfectly. In the tribal area where nearly four million people live without law courts, policemen, judges and hangmen,you seldom hear of adultery or murder. Elopements are rare. For the risk is great and the price heavy for rare lips and beautiful eyes. If the culprits get married, the hunt is slackened ; the boy is made to pay damages in the form of giving away two or three girls to the family from which he stole one. But he won't live long if he deceives her or deserts her. The whole tribe of the girl will hunt him down and his own will refuse to protect him. Custom does not allow protection

to a breaker of custom. He stands alone and must pay the price. Even his friends will avoid the funeral. It is hard and brutal, but it works. After all you cannot use a dog leash to tame a wolf.

There is another point. The Pathan has no hospitals or doctors. And it is established that the most horrible diseases are given by man to woman and woman to man. Syphilis, for example. The Pathan knew no cure for it, so he took the most drastic preventive measure. Death to him who dares to risk the health of his tribe. It is treachery and sabotage which you also punish with death. The knot is the same though the thread is different.

The Pathan has thousands of customs—for death, birth, marriage, love, hate and war. To try to count them or even to attempt a very sketchy portrait of their purpose and function is impossible. They are neither good nor bad, for they depend on time, place and circumstance. But this can be said about all of them, that they are an attempt to hold and preserve a standard of value and way of life that has given the world a great fighter and a poor soldier. For many of the customs of the Pathans are older than their Greek soldier-fathers. But they also have many customs and traditions which give a picture of the system of thinking and living that produced the wild Alexander and his conquering army. When the Pathan is a child his mother tells him, "the coward dies but his shrieks live long after," and so he learns not to shriek. He is shown dozens of things dearer than life so that he will not mind either dying or killing. He is forbidden colourful clothes or exotic music, for they weaken the arm and soften the eye. He is taught to look at the hawk and forget the nightingale. He is asked to kill his beloved to save the soul of her children. It is a perpetual surrender—an eternal giving up of man to man and to their wise follies.

You and I do the same every day. In this age of vote

and democracy Don Juan is hopelessly outnumbered. The respectable, the wise, and the aged make the laws and the customs to mould to a pattern the youth and rebellion of life. An artist mingles many strokes and shades to create an impression, a musician many tunes to create a single song. The colour that does not mix, the note that is out of harmony, must go though the going be hard.

Customs and laws save man from what is too good for him and from what is too bad for him. They maintain a standard and knock out those who are too big for it as readily as those who are too small for it. His customs are as good as your laws and as bad. Both are intolerant of rebels and both depend for their growth on those who are big enough to break them.

Such is life.

(7)

MOONBEAMS

SILENCE

When silence is overcome by love, it turns into a song,
When a song becomes obstinate it turns into noise,
When a thought is sure of itself it turns into a word,
When a word feels like dancing it turns into music,
And when music goes a-dreaming it turns into silence,
Silence is the beginning, Silence the end.

FATE

Fate may be likened to the keys on a musical instrument:
They arrest the 'hum' of a string and give it variety, life, form and feeling,
Like the crystal that takes the white light of the sun and breaks it into myriad shades and colours.
Life without facts is like a sound without notes—
Monotony is eternity.

THE SAINT

The biggest fool in the world is also the biggest saint in the world.
It is easy to cheat him, because he does not know how to cheat,
It is easy to lie to him, because he does not know how to lie.
He pays more for things because he cannot value them normally,
He would give the world for a thing for which the wise would not pay eight annas,

He would not pay eight annas for a thing for which the wise would give the world ;
He would lose a great opportunity just to see if he dared, and laugh at death just to spite it.
He is insolent to the strong and kind to the weak,
He loves his brother and is honest with his wife—
He is the greatest fool in the world—
He prefers flowers to potatoes and interesting beggars to dull kings—
He likes to live for a dream and not for the royal banquet,
He would rather think than eat,
He would rather dance than think,
He would rather sleep and snore than sit up and be polite to his rich mother-in-law,
He would rather console the little fragile heart of a child than sit up and patch the pride of the proud and powerful,
He would rather be the great friend of a small dog than the small friend of a great man,
He likes to talk of fairies and grass-hoppers and prefers the gold in the moon to the gold in your pocket—
He is the biggest fool in the world.

THE SOUL

I walked into a garden,
I asked the rose,
" O rose, do you see the loveliness of your petals, do you know the beauty of your being ?"
" No," said the rose,
" I only know autumn and the spring that is to follow it."
I asked the butterfly, " O perfect song, do you know the sweetness of your melody ?"
"No," said the butterfly, " I only know that I am a butterfly."
I asked the Bulbul, " O lover, do you know the face of your beloved ?"
" No," said the Bulbul, " I only know my song."

"Ah poor wretched fools," said I, and turned away from the garden with a pride in the awareness of my soul and the wisdom in my head.

And a poppy lifted up her mschievous head and asked me,

"Master, do you know who you are?"

MAN

O priest of logic, O priest of sermons,
O priest of tales of the day of judgment,
O priest of fate, O priest of nemesis,
O priest of heaven, O teller of hell ;
I am neither the gardener nor the prince
of this garden,

So why must you tell me the histories
of growth;

For I am only a Honey Bee,
I know only sweetness and I know only flowers,
I am only a tiny butterfly,
I know how to come in for a moment and go out.
I am only a whiff of zephyr,
And kuow only a moment of the evening.
I am only a drop of wine,
I only know the lips, I only know the cup.

O I am a tinkle of the dancing bell,
I only know the rhythm in the dancer's feet.
O I am a spark of longing,
I only know sorrow, I only know joy.
So why do you tell me the histories of growth,
For I am neither the prince nor mali *of this garden.*

Note : All these poems are from the works of Lewanae Falsafi. You have never heard of him. Neither have most of the Pathans. He is a young Pathan poet who has published nothing though he has written much.

(8)

PRIEST, MAGIC AND CHARMS LTD.

MEHER, my tenant, was not handsome to look at. He had green eyes set in a broad Mongolian face, which was dark and pock-marked. He had powerful shoulders and a deep chest. His limbs were magnificent, his strength like a bull's but he had a way of looking at things through the corner of his shifty eyes that always succeeded in irritating and annoying me. He was the best farmer and the biggest thief in my village. As the Khan of a Pathan village who, besides his many other portfolios, is in charge of law and order also, Meher and I did not like each other. He hated the customs and laws of our society as much as I did. Only he always had the pleasure of breaking them and I the duty of drilling them into his thick obstinate head. For cruel and oppressive as the customs and laws are, they are the only binding force of our culture. A strong horse needs thick ropes to save him and the world from its mischievous youth and destructive strength. I had to break in this youthful stallion to the law of his race and he hated it. So did I, because I am neither a prophet nor a general. I am a poet. I would much rather see a stallion rear and buck and gallop and jump with the grace and joy of youth than tie him in a stable and make him chew to order.

Anyway, Meher escaped that doom; he died of typhoid. When I went to see him he was in the last stages. His gigantic body had refused to melt or surrender but his eyes were tired.

His family were in despair. They had all the

doctors I had recommended one after another, and paid dear money for coloured and smelly things in bottles. Then his mother had looked with panic-stricken eyes at the heroic struggle of his body and shouted : "Black Magic. Why, look, his body is big as a mountain and yet he is overcome !" She told her old husband, " If it were a disease, one of these big doctors would have known it and given him the right medicine. They could not because it is not a disease. It is black magic." " Woman's talk," said the old man to his son Usman, who was standing frowning nearby. " Listen to him," said the old woman. " He sits with his educated Khans and consequently does not believe in prayers and charms. But don't you remember Umar had the same kind of trouble which no one could cure until they brought the Shah Sahib of Fairies. He found the evil charm and saved his life by the grace of Allah and the kind spirit of his Masters. It took a long time but he is still alive. Don't you remember ? You and your Khans can say what you like. But it works. He is saving people every day in all the villages." Usman assented with his head. " Let us try it. There is no harm. We won't discontinue his English medicine, and give the Shah Sahib a chance also. You never know, it may save Meher." " All right, get him," said the old man. "And a curse on your mother for her long tongue." And as he found it rather uncomfortable to stay at home, after this he went to his field grumbling and muttering.

Usman went away and returned in the evening with Shah Sahib. The whole thing was a secret from me, because I held rather strong views on magic and it is a dangerous risk for a magician to be within easy reach of my hands. I had expressed on several occasions a great longing to close my fingers around Shah Sahib's greasy throat and ask him to use all his magic to wriggle out of them.

For, the magician, the priest and the charmer are the

greatest enemies of man. They pour darkness into the soul and deaden intelligence. They stunt his growth and fight against knowledge because they flourish on ignorance. They steal not only the hard-earned money of the poor, but also their brains. They lead him into darkness in the name of light and make him worship the devil in the name of God. They carry the bacteria of rot and stupidity and infect the mind. They are the national plague No. 1. Being a very conscientious Director of Health of my little village, I wanted to meet Shahji.

Shahji is a slim little man. There is a look of genteel breeding and refinement about his face. His delicate grey beard is neatly combed. His long grey locks are oiled and curly. He wears the white turban of the priest and is dressed in dignified white robes to suggest purity. He is serious, mysterious and prophetically calm and composed.

As soon as he approached the village, all the farmers rose respectfully, for he traced his descent to a famous saint. He went straight into the Zenana where Meher was twitching in agony surrounded by women. Shah Sahib is always happy among women. They are sympathetic ; they understand. He looked at Meher's eyes. He frowned and mumbled something. " Ah !" he said. There was sensation all round. The women opened their eyes wide and waited. Shah Sahib looked at Meher and noted the young age and the powerful body, so he said " Ah !" again and then finally, "It is a girl." Great sensation. Meher's mother was satisfied and felt proud. " Did I not tell you it was some evil woman who loved my handsome big Meher." All the old women looked sharply at the young and unmarried ones, which made them feel hot and confused.

Shah Sahib sat down, produced a book full of charts and magic formulae, took out a plain sheet of paper and started drawing, writing, reciting and calculating.

His face was serious and his brows remained knit for a long dramatic period. Then he woke up with a look of joy in his face and turned to Meher's mother who had been holding her breath all this time. " Mother, I think we shall be able to find the evil charm. Pray for our success, mother." He turned to Usman. "Come my boy, pick up a hoe," and marched out, leaving the old women howling their prayers to heaven.

Usman went with him alone. The crowd was asked to stay behind. Usman was made to dig one place for a foot or so, while the priest searched the earth with his fingers. The charm did not appear. Shahji looked dismayed. Usman's faith wavered. Shahji pointed to another spot and asked him to dig. After he had dug for about ten minutes, Shahji got up from the pit and began to look for another spot. Usman lost more faith. He looked hurt and angry. He dug away furiously. Shah Sahib came back sadly and motioned him to stop. Feigning a sad surprise at his own failure he said, " Well, I don't understand it. Usman, you search the dug-up earth this time, while I try to find another place. Curse the evil girl!"

As Usman turned up the earth he came upon a tin bottle 2½ inches long (a convenient size for the pocket as well as the palm). "Holy Father," he shouted, " here it is." His eyes were blazing. He had recovered his faith. He signalled to the villagers and shouted to his brothers. They all came rushing and surrounded them. Shah Sahib took off the lid from the bottle. Inside was a neatly made cloth doll. He pulled it out, and examined it. "Oh, cursed woman," he said, " poor Meher, look at these pins stuck into the charmed doll. Each one is like a sword in Meher's side." Great sensation. Even Meher's father was dumb with amazement. The news was broken to the women. They were duly mystified and overjoyed. Shahji removed the pins and burnt the doll in their presence. He mumbled prayers

from the Quran and blew them into Meher's face and after blessing the crowd and threatening dire revenge on the unknown girl, took his leave. Meher's mother touched his feet and kissed his hands with thankful tears streaming down her face.

After he had gone out, she shouted to Usman to serve Shah Sahib tea and cream, and come back. While Shah Shib was basking in the warmth of the villagers' respect and admiration, Usman went to his mother. She took out a bundle of dirty old notes, their only family saving of years of toil. "Give it to Shah Sahib as a thanksgiving." "But mother," protested Usman, "this will buy us a good bullock." "Is a bullock better than Meher ?" she snapped scornfully. Usman was subdued. He went out, took Shah Sahib aside and pushed the notes into his hands with humble apologies. Shah Sahib accepted them graciously and said that he really would not dream of taking payment for his services, but the charm would not work unless the thanksgiving money was paid.

He came back, wrote another charm to be tied around Meher's head and left for his village in the tender care of several devoted villagers.

Meher died the next morning. I paid his funeral expenses. His father borrowed from me to pay the priests who said prayers over the grave. He sold his bullocks to pay for the food which his friends and relations ate when they came to condole.

I am still looking for Shah Sahib. If one of these days you hear that Khan Abdul Ghani Khan is charged for murder, you will know I have met him.

(9)
REVENGE

SHER KHAN was the son of a weak, pious Khan, who shared a fraction of a village with his many powerful cousins. They all wrestled with one another for power but no one bothered Sher's father. Being a weakling in this world he was full of ambitions for the next. He wore priestly clothes, exchanged his revolver for a string of rosary beads, and deserted the Bachelors House (Hujra) for the mosque.

He mixed up hopelessly his fear of his cousins with his fear of the Lord. The little coward tried to be a big saint and consequently lost his sense of humour. He preached against snuff and smoke, wore an impressive beard and never smiled. He mistook a bad liver for a good soul and his poor wife paid for it. Sher, the child of this pulpy jelly-fish, was a mountain of strength—the picture of the longings of a strong woman married to a weak man. His father did not dare spank him even when he was very small. At nineteen he was big and powerful and insolent and proud. He treated his weak old father with contempt and his tough little mother with indifference—yet they both worshipped him.

His father saw in him all that he found missing in himself. Domineering power, commanding pride, a pleasant face and dancing eyes. His mother found his commanding tone a refreshing change from the irritable whinings of his father. They both worshipped him. He treated them both like dirt under his feet. But the young men of his village he treated with great love and devotion. He ate with them, slept with them and

gambled with them. He knew how to make them worship him and he also knew how to use that worship.

No one was quicker to see these qualities than his uncle Dalaire Khan. Dalaire Khan was a bullying, domineering old scoundrel, wit ɹa big good-natured face and small elephant-eyes. He was a great eater and a great hunter and always in debt. Hə was generous and hospitable and had a thundering big laugh with which he welcomed and flattered you. A lovable old scoundrel who hated his weak, saintly brother because he always took care to remind him of death and the devil. No good-hearted man wishes to be reminded of them. Dalaire Khan found his brother's attitude vicious revengeful and narrow, and thought it was specially invented to torture him. He had hounded his brother out of the village and playground into the mosque. Dalaire Khan was the undisputed Khan of the village, his brother the undisputed Saint. Dalaire hunted and sang and feasted his friends. His brother prayed and grumbled and preached little virtues in big words. It was a satisfactory arrangement, until something happened to upset it. Dalaire's cousin Kurban Khan arrived in the next village after finishing a term of life-imprisonment for a murder that he had not committed. He was a notorious fighter all the same and the villagers talked of nothing but his deeds of reckless courage and extraordinary fairness. In one of these fights Kubran had shot Dalaire's father (his own uncle) in the leg. The old man had forgiven him (because it was obviously a mistake) but tradition had not. The blood was there, shrieking for revenge—his blood, his father's blood.

Kurban having served fourteen years of hard labour thought he had paid for all his sins. He came out of prison a clean, honest man full of goodwill and compassion. The villagers had flocked to him hoping to see a hero and had found a man, straight and humble, kind and well bred. They thought of the things of utter

recklessness that he had done and looked at his soft humorous eyes and loved him.

The attendance at Dalaire's house dwindled and at Kurban's increased. Dalaire spent lavsihly, hunted madly, entertained royally and borrowed thoughtlessly, but still it was Kurban who attracted all those he wanted. He sat at his Dastarkhan* from day to day, watched people eat his roasted sheep and knew that they were there for the sheep and not for him. Not one of them was worth the food he ate. Yet at Kurban's table, where the food was simple and plain, the guests were strong and faithful and the servants brave and honest. Dalaire grew to hate the smiling face and simple generosity of Kurban for they spelt his doom.

Then Sher grew up, strong and proud and handsome. Dalaire Khan looked into his grey blue eyes and shivered. He listened to the lusty young voices singing in his Hujra and heard the cough of croaking old throats in his own. He felt his pistol and looked at his little son of five. He looked into his little face grimly and said, " Dilawar, my boy, you must be the Khan of this village, even if I pay for it with my soul."

The next day he brought Sher to lunch and gave him a revolver as a present (the best present you can give any Pathan). He laughed and joked with him and treated him like an equal. This greatly flattered Sher Khan, who was used to the august piety of his own father It also made him love his big uncle. Dalaire Khan spent lavishly on his nephew, roasted sheep for his friends and told dirty tales about his enemies. He introduced him to big and famous Khans and took him out hunting to far-away valleys and distant villages. He treated him like a son and listened to him like a friend. He fussed about his food and worried about his comfort. He smiled at his follies and laughed at his jokes. He did every-

*Dastarkhan is a long cloth that is spread on the carpet for a meal. It is the Asiatic cousin of the Western dining-table.

thing to make him love him. He succeeded. Sher forgot his age and talked to him as an equal, as a friend.

As soon as Dalaire was sure the boy would believe him he began to tell him stories about his grandfather. He gave instances of his good nature and kindness and great humanity. He painted the old Khan skilfully in the favourite colours of Sher. When he was sure that Sher worshipped his grandfather he told him how Kurban Khan had shot the old Khan just to humiliate him. It worked and Sher was furious. Dalaire was grateful. "But," said Sher with blazing eyes, "I thought it was an accident." "Accident?" said Dalaire with scorn. "These accidents are rather common. It is a good way of crawling out of your responsibility when you are not strong enough to fulfil it. You see it suited your father and me to accept it as an accident and we did so. He was too weak and I was too young." Sher's lips curled up in contempt. "Afraid to revenge the blood of your own father," he said aghast. Dalaire put his arm around him. "I will stand by you, my son," he said, "and give you the village of Kizas as a medal of honour." "I will show you I am not afraid," said Sher and went away.

That night he lay awake and thought of his closest boy friends, the income from Kizas and his wonderful grandfather, and forgot his warm young wife by his side. It was cold and drizzling, a miserable evening. Kurban Khan was stirring a worn-out fire and telling his tenants a tale. "You know how stupid youth is," he said with a grin. "Well, I was young once, and thought the world belonged to me. Anyone that did not agree with me forfeited his right to live. One evening Zangi quarrelled with me and I vowed I would kill him. I went to keep my word the next day, and shot my dear old uncle instead. I nearly killed myself when I learnt it. But good old uncle forgave me. That

hurt more. Then, after a month someone killed Zangi and his brother accused me of it. The judge gave me twenty years, because I had threatened to kill Zangi in the open bazaar and I was famous for keeping my word. I did not grumble. I paid in the name of Zangi for all the sins I had committed."

"My Khan," said Gulam, "You must protect yourself." Kurban Khan smiled. "Death would be the final price. I would not mind paying it." Just then two guests walked in. They were carrying shot guns. Kurban Khan looked at them and smiled. "Where do you come from, my friends," he inquired. "We come from Pata Village, our Khan," they replied, "and are looking for a lost mare." And they settled down in a corner and kept silent.

All the tenants left one by one. Kurban got up to go to his house. He smiled at the strangers. "I will bring you your luck for tonight," he told them and went out.

A quarter of an hour later he returned with a tray full of plates and eyes full of kindness. "Here is what you were destined to have today," he said with a smile. One of the guests lifted up his gun and shot him in the eyes: the other lifted his and shot him in the shoulders. The tray dropped with a crash and Kurban Khan fell with a deadly thud.

The two guests rushed out and joined Sher Khan who was hiding nearby. They ran through fields and crops and got into waiting horses. They galloped away, from duty and murder, pride and folly.

Sher returned to his village the next day and attended his uncle's funeral. In the meanwhile Dalaire had rushed to Kurban Khan's brothers and sworn that Sher had killed him. Thus he put the finishing touch to his plan to kill Kurban and hang Sher and thus keep a clear field for his son Dilawar.

Sher was sentenced to fourteen years. He was a dignified prisoner and came out after serving seven

years. He came out stronger and prouder than he had gone in.

Dalaire gave a big feast in his honour. Sher accepted because he did not wish to show his hatred for the uncle who had used his young love to deceive him and had made of him a tool. He asked for the village of Kizas, the prize for saving the name of the family. Dalaire ground his teeth and refused, for the branch of Kurban's family was strong and influential, and he could not give away the village without condemning himself to their wrath and revenge. He refused. Sher looked at him hard and with loathing. "You made me kill my own uncle," he said, "and by Allah you must pay for it." Dalaire put his hand on his revolver. "I will not give away a village for the murder of my own brother," he said obstinately. "You have grown wiser in these years, Sher, so have I. I will not confirm in my old age the follies of my youth. You forget, my dear young nephew that a Pathan would rather give up his life than surrender his land or wife. They are both sacred."

Sher understood and waited. It took him three months to train a young man to pull the trigger on him. Dalaire died with his hand on his revolver. Sher is an outlaw ever since. He lives in a little village in the tribal territory amidst hardship and danger and cowdung. His voice has lost its deep tones and his eyes their pride. Fifteen years is a long time and fifteen years of loneliness and persecution are longer. Time and the world have broken in Sher Khan. He has learnt to beg and beseech. He does not hunt any longer for he knows what it feels like to be hunted. He has grown kind and gentle like Kurban Khan, the uncle he had killed. And Kurban has a son who is strong, proud and handsome, and is not afraid of his uncle Sher Khan, though he be the bravest and most daring man in his tribe. Some day the two must meet. Revenge and Death, Death and Revenge, always and forever.

(10)

POLITICS

THE politics of the Pathan centre round gold and power, hunger and ambition, just like yours. As he has more blood in his veins and more bubbles in his head than you have, he is inclined to make them rather lively. Politics today do what religion did five hundred years ago. They are merely a system men have developed, whereby they pay for their stupidities by giving crafty wise men and earnest fools the power to rule them. For every man must rule or be ruled. There is no third way unless you are a poet or a lunatic.

Being direct and rather thick between the ears, every Pathan imagines he is Alexander the Great and wants the world to admit it. The result is a constant struggle between cousin and cousin, brother and brother and quite often between father and son. This has proved his sole undoing through the ages. They have not succeeded in being a great nation because there is a autocrat in every home, who would rather burn his own house than see his brother rule it.

A violent temperament, a domineering nature and abysmal ignorance are his only sources of inspiration. When he cannot be the Lord Mayor of Delhi, he develops a great contempt for Delhi and a great love for his two-and-a-half mud houses, where he can and does function as Lord Mayor. He loves his own freedom, but hates to give freedom to anyone else. A true democrat. He thinks he is as good as anyone and his father rolled into one and is stupid enough to try this sort of thing even with his wife. She pays for it in youth and he in old age.

He suffers from a pronounced lack of tact and a distinct excess of practical self-expression. He would rather shoot his way out of a problem than get a headache thinking about it. He has great ambition and no patience ; that is why he usually dies rather young. He has a great heart and a thick head ; that is why he makes a charming friend and a fine host. He has a proud head and an empty stomack ; that is why he is a great dacoit.

When he has to choose between ransom and alms, he chooses ransom, because he is a man and not a worm. He looks at the torn clothes of his beautiful young wife and the hungry eyes of his child. He picks up rifle and grits his teeth and goes into the jaws of death to procure a yard of cloth for the one and a mouthful of food for the other. When a social system fails to provide for his dear ones, he tramples it down under his grass sandals. When a political arrangement decides to starve him and overfeed another he shoots holes into it.

That is a quality in him which I admire. He would rather steal than beg. So would I. He would rather face the anger of God and man than the shame and disgrace of poverty. He would rather look into the frightened eyes of a kidnapped merchant than the sad accusing eyes of his ill-fed wife and the hungry, hopeful glance of his wretched children. I would rather see a man hang for dacoity than see him crawl along a pavement with outstretched palms, asking for alms from those who have found generous buyers for their souls. The Pathan loves to steal because he hates to beg. That is why I love him, in spite of his thick head and vain heart. He would rather break his head than sell it with that genteel submission so common in civilised man.

These two hundred years the British have bribed and corrupted him. They bought up his priests and Khans and Faqirs. They purchased the tin-gods he worshipped, paid him with Indian gold in the service of English folly and asked him to put out his eyes and his spirit.

It worked in bits and for a while.

Just to give you an idea of the gentle Christian mind I would like to tell you a story of Tirah. Tirah is a land of strange stories and stranger customs.

It is the house of the Afridis.

The tribesmen have so many living, moving and colourful facts to talk about that they do not have to draw on fiction to light up their humdrum darkness with artificial light. Here is a true story.

Tirah has a large, wide-awake and virile population of Muslim Sunnis and a small, intelligent and clever minority of muslim Shias. Both the sects are pure Afridis by stock and blood. They lie between India and Afghanistan and pay for it. When Amanullah Khan perked up a bit, and behaved like the Pathan he was, heedless, go-ahead and careless, white Sahibs objected. And while Amanullah and his Queen danced in the capitals of Europe, jealousy and ambition and hunger and ignorance were marshalled together into a battalion of destruction by Christian gold in the capital of Afghanistan.

The Shias of Tirah were more intelligent than their neighbours. Amanullah was broadminded and tolerant of the various sects in Islam. The Shias of Tirah loved him and supported him. They were willing and ready to thrust from the south-west and defend the young monarch. But lo and behold, simultaneously with the resentment of the priests in Afghanistan, there appeared eloquent priests not among the Shias but the Sunnis of Tirah.

And while in Afghanistan the learned beards and heavy turbans shook in pious rage to denounce the Christian ways and un-Pathan and un-Islamic ethics of the young king, in Tirah they shook to denounce the Shias, the murderers of Usman, the beloved son-in-law of the Prophet. Most of these lovers of Usman were from the settled districts, the area under British rule.

Heaven and houris were promised to those who killed the Shias. The Afridis listened. The gold offered and the huoris promised proved too much for them. They picked up their rifles and went in search of Heaven.

Then followed a most frightful destruction not only of the Shias but of cattle and trees as well. Valleys where the Shias lived were laid desolate—millions of fruits trees, hundreds of years old Chinars and almond plantations were sawn down. The Shias were too broken and distracted to come to Amanullah's help.

They paid for their wisdom with blood and tears, and Amanullah paid for his with crown and kingdom. For daring to assert his freedom, he lost his only kingdom and the Afghans their only king. And for daring to help an ideal, the Shias lost their children and orchards. A masterpiece of cold, efficient planning and brilliant, ruthless execution.

I would leave you to decide who profited by this blood-shed and horror, darkness and hatred.

This is only one of the thousands of such stories of the Tribal Territory. Every word of it is true. Some Sunnis may not know who drove them, but the Shias know who struck them. Some Pathans may not have been able to save Amanullah, but they know why they could not save him.

The sole role of the political department of the Government of India under the British was to try to teach the hawks of Khyber the wretched ways of the crow and the vulture. It seduced the lowest and the greediest of the tribe and gave them importance and bought influence for them. A tool must be important and influential. All influence in the tribes belonged to the Khan and the Priest—one is the lord of this world, the other claims the lordship of the next.

The Political Service supplied the tribes with divine-looking priests, who put on the uniform of Allahs' servant to serve the devil. They perverted the tribesmen's in-

tense devotion to God into an intense hatred of his brother. They used his childish faith and honesty in the service of deceit and corruption.

The British succeeded beautifully. The Pathans were too busy cutting one another's throat to think of anything else. There was blood and darkness everywhere. The Empire was safe and Pathan damned.

But then something happened. To know what that something was, we must leave the tribesmen and their hills and come down into rich valleys of the so-called Settled Area, the North-West Frontier Province, for it was in a little village in the prosperous Peshawar valley that the first Khudai Khidmatgar was born.

He was the fifth child of a tail, beautiful, blue-eyed woman and an honest and strudy blue-blooded old Khan. His father, Behram Khan, had no feuds—a unique distinction for a Khan, because he had forgiven all his enemies. He never told a lie, he did not know how to. He liked the British who ruled him through he could never remember their names. He loved horses but was a poor rider. He was optimistic to a fault and consequently possessed a fine sense of humour. He was painfully honest ; therefore the people loved him.

Behram Khan lived and farmed and laughed and cursed merrily upto a ripe old age ; his two daughters were well married. His eldest son was a Captain in the British Army. He had enrolled from his college in London and fought bravely all through the war. His younger son had refused a commission and taken to farming and religion. Behram Khan did not understand this sort of thing, but then he had given up trying to understand his younger son. Being thc youngest child he was his mother's pet. The boy was kind and clean and six-foot-three. He loved his old father and always gave strange, noble reasons for doing things. The old Khan forgave him everything, even refusing a commission in the Army. Besides, his beautiful old

mother supported the boy. She seemed to understand him better than he. She understood everything the child did. And if she said it was all right it must be so. So Behram Khan gave him a village to manage, married him to the girl he wanted to marry and hoped he would give up his strange notions and settle down.

The young man adored his wife—a whimsical lovable, generous creature, well-bred and from a fine old family. But still he wandered. He worshipped his children, two sons, but very often when he sat by the fire he would stop cuddling them and a far-away look would come into his eyes. His lovely wife knew these moods and hated them. For every woman likes to possess all of a man. She realised that there was something in this strong, handsome husband of hers that made him forget her beautiful eyes and the twitters of her children by the fierside.

She did not live long to see that those long silences and dark moods turn into strength and action. She died before she was twenty-five. They covered her with flowers and took her to the burial ground in her wedding robe. She left behind two baby boys with a bewildered, terrified look in their eyes. They sensed the horror of death though they did not understand or know what it meant.

Abdul Ghaffar Khan's restlessness increased. The European war had brought to India a hypocritical promise of advance at its beginning and an influenza epidemic in the end. He left his children in the tender care of his old mother and drowned his sorrow in work and service.

He had found his profession in life. He had found a new love—his people. Pathans must be united, educated, reformed and organised. He started to talk to them, to draw their attention to the misery and darkness of their lives. He tried to make the Pathan think. He succeeded rather too well for his own neck in the

beginning. The simple Khans of Hashnagar collected in a big mosque and said he was their king—" Badshah." The local representatives of his Britannic Majesty lost their sense of humour (that wonderful English sense of humour that you always see in *Punch* but seldom in an Englishman's eyes). The Assistant Commissioner arrived with soldiers and artillery, surrounded the village, disarmed the inhabitants and fined them sixty-five thousand rupees. He gave them a lecture in broken and ridiculous Pushto on the British might and carried away sixty respectable old Khans as hostages until the fine was paid. This crowd included Behram Khan who was then about seventy-five years old and had been a confirmed and loyal friend of the British. The others too were as innocent of any serious rebellion as he was. But they all hated the insult. They resented their helplessness. They felt the bonds of slavery for the first time. Being Pathans they did not try to clear the misunderstanding ; anyway they were too angry to do anything except curse. They just grit their teeth, and told the Englisgman : " All right, if you think we are rebels, well then we are. You can do your worst and to hell with you."

Abdul Ghaffar Khan narrowly escaped the gallows. This incident gave him his pet name " Badshah Khan " which means the "King Khan"—the name by which the Pathans have since known him. Far from frightening him it made him braver. It gave him a sympathetic following and a great name. Even old Behram Khan began to curse the English and liked his son for getting on their nerves.

Then Badshah Khan opened a school. He made an association called "Pathan Reformer." Its aims and objects were purely social. It was non-political and purely missionary. And yet he was arrested and sentenced to three years' hard labour. When he pleaded with the rulers that education was no crime, that he was merely helping the Government, the reply

given was. "Yes. But if you are allowed to organise the Pathans for social reform, what is the guarantee that this organisation will not be used against the government and its interest ?" You must trust me," said Badshah Khan. "No," said the high and mighty. "You must apologise and give a security that you won't do it again and you will be set free." "Give a security that I will cease to love and serve my people ? "asked Badshah Khan aghast, for he had read in a mission school and had many illusions about Christian justice and charity.

"This is not service. It is rebellion," said the high and mighty, more to ease his conscience than to instruct Badshah Khan. This magic sentence condmened Badshah Khan to three years of torture and entitled the high and mighty to a higher grade of pay and a title next year.

In the meanwhile the school flourished and the society remained organised and active. The three long years finished, Badshah Khan came out of jail, frail and worn out. But his spirit was like steel. His brown eyes were proud of their suffering and determined and cold. He put his arms around his motherless sons and caressed with trembling fingers, their warm, excited cheeks. Behram Khan was in great good humour. He poured out tea to thousands of visitors and said little complimentary things about Englishmen and their grandmothers. Pathans by the thousand rushed to Badshah Khan to welcome him home. Boys looked at him with admiration, girls sang songs about him. The Pathans had found their greatest outlaw. The nation of fighters had discovered their leader, thanks to the British.

The British master was furious. How dare these damned Pathans worship that rebel ! They must be taught a lesson soon, but before that this stupid big man must be removed at once. Badshah Khan was always an easy person to arrest and sentence because he was too big and too brave to use subterfuge and camouflage. He did everything in the open and dared the British

and the devil to do what they could about it. They shut him up in a prison again and hoped he would know which side his bread was buttered. He suffered the tortures of the damned—solitary confinement. heavy chains on his hands and feet, dirt and filth and lice and hunger, and most of all insults and kicks, jeers and sneers from the lowest and the most loathsome of British lackeys. He ground his forty pounds of corn daily with the hand-mill and never complained. He was a model prisoner always. He never complained of the worms in his vegetables. He treated his captors with an aloof contempt that almost resembled respect. He was kind in spite of his strength and gentle even with his enemies. He forgave everything to everyone, and possessed unlimited patience. He always covered his sorrow with a smile and his pain with a joke.

When he came out this time he started his first political agitation, a demand for full reforms for the Frontier.

Ninety-eight per cent of the Pathans are illiterate, a written piece of paper says nothing to him. So Badshah Khan went from village to village talking to them. His companions found that their white clothes got easily dirty. So they decided to colour them. One of them took his to the local tannery and dipped them in the solution of pine bark prepared for the skins. The result was a dark browny red. The rest did the same. When next the group went out, the unusual colour attracted the eye at once. People left their ploughs in the fields and came to have a look at the red-clad men. They came, saw and were conquered. Badshah Khan adopted the colour for his new workers, whom he called Khudai Khidmatgars. Their aim was freedom : their motto service.

I have given you rather long sketch of Badshah Khan because he really is the politics of the Pathan. He understands the Pathans and the Pathans understand him and you cannot understand either unless you are a

Pathan.

Badshah Khan is an old man now. He has a silvery white bread and long beautifui hands. When you see him next look into his kind brown eyes and you will know more about Pathan politics than I could tell you in a thousand chapters. For the holiest and the finest in a man is as inexpressible as stardust and moonlight. Love and kindness cannot be imprisoned in letters any more than in an English prison. Badshah Khan has discovered by practical experience that love can create more in a second than the atom bombs can destroy in a century, that the kindest strength is the greatest strength ; that the only way to be brave is to be right ; that a clean dream is dearer than life and the soft eyes of your children. Toese are the things he has taught the Pathan.



(11)

CONCLUSION

I HAVE come to the end of my story. I hope you enjoyed hearing it as much I enjoyed telling it. Reading is the civilised form of listening, and writing a complicated way of talking.

I have tried to tell you of my people. Not from a cold, unbiased, unprejudiced point of view, because I am not a stone, which is the only thing that may be described truthfully as unbiased.

Thought is an expression of prejudice. Inspiration is above prejudice and therefore above thought. Prejudice and bias is mother's milk to man. The sooner you admit it the better. When I see a judge of the High Court, with his serious face and his noble wig, dispensing " unbiased justice," I always want to laugh. No. I won't do that. I am a Pathan and must be honest, so I will frankly admit that I am prejudiced in favour of my people. Indeed I would hate myself if I were not.

I have given you my picture of them. How could I give any other ! I love them in spite of their murders and cruelty, ignorance and hunger. Because he kills for a principle and cares not who calls it murder. He is a great democrat. " The Pathans," he says, " are rainsown wheat—they all came up on the same day—they are all the same."

In our Red Shirt movement when we put the pips of a general on the shoulder of a Pathan butcher or weaver he grins, he does not blush. However dirty and coarse his hand he will stretch it to a king

for a hand-shake. However meagre his meal he will invite an emperor to share it. "Look at the warmth in my eyes',, he tells his guest, "and not the hardness of the corn bread before you."

But the chief reason why I love him is because he will wash his face and oil his beard and perfume his locks and put on his best pair of clothes when he goes out to fight and die. The dear child wants the houris to like him. He thinks God will dislike a dirty face as much as he does himself ; so he washes it.

He says Allah
Is good and sweet
To him who laughs
And sings and dies.
He says the cowards
Weep and work,
But fighters go
To Paradise.

I am definitely prejudiced in his favour. I hope by now you too are prejuiced.

